

CRIME

Melbourne defense lawyer accused of running prostitution ring

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A Melbourne defense lawyer is accused of using his legal practice to find women he could coerce into prostitution, according to arrest reports.

John Gillespie, 71, had multiple women staying in his Hickory Street home in Melbourne where he had been conducting prostitution activity for months, according to investigators.

The Metropolitan Bureau of Investigation, a multi-agency task force based in Orange and Osceola counties, arrested Gillespie Saturday after months of surveillance and interviews with confidential informants.

Gillespie's arrest came after undercover investigators posing as a prospective client and a 16-year-old girl arranged to meet with him at the Hilton Garden Inn on Augusta Drive in Melbourne.

He is being charged with racketeering, conspiracy to commit racketeering and unlawful use of a two-way communication device. Gillespie is currently being held at the Orange County Jail without bond.

Investigators said Gillespie would provide the women with narcotics, allow them the use of his home and exchange legal services for sex acts.

The investigation began last year when a confidential informant told investigators Gillespie offered them money for sex when he was meant to be representing them in 2001.

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Gillespie would reportedly bring the informant to strip clubs where he picked out the youngest girls before asking for help recruiting them for prostitution, investigators said.

Text messages between Gillespie and the informant corroborated the informant's story that Gillespie used woman to recruit other women into prostitution, according to the reports.

Soon after, MBI agents began arranging undercover phone calls to solicit the services of the women seen in online advertisements.

When they called, Gillespie answered, giving them information about rates and scheduling.

"There's lots of girls here. Most of them are adults," he allegedly told an undercover agent during one such phone call.

Investigators found that Gillespie laid out "rules" on what could and could not be done by the girls, "clearly indicating that he was in charge," according to investigative reports.

He also made decisions on what percentages of the proceeds the women and girls would receive and how much he would make, investigators said.

An alleged accomplice of Gillespie's, 26-year-old Mark Featherman of Brevard County, was also arrested on the same charges and is being held at the Brevard County Jail. Featherman's exact involvement in the activity was not outlined by investigators.

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